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Africa Review

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23 August 1985

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Articles have been coordinated as appropriate with other offices within CIA. Comments and queries regarding this publication may be directed to the Chief, Production Staff, Office of African and Latin American Analysis,

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Articles

Madagascar: Crackdown Against Martial Arts Group []

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On 1 August, Army and gendarmerie troops mounted a bloody joint operation in the capital against the stronghold of a banned martial arts group, spawning rumors that the regime was moving to squash an attempted coup by military dissidents. According to the US Embassy, the kung fu practitioners had been acting as vigilantes and the regime moved forcefully to subdue them and reassert its authority. President Ratsiraka, in power since 1975, emerged from the incident with renewed strength against domestic opponents, but his heavyhanded approach has won no sympathy among urban dwellers concerned with unresolved economic and social problems that have contributed to the growth and popularity of the martial arts groups. []

The Crackdown

The state-controlled media claimed that the kung fu groups, prohibited since September 1984, were operating as "a state within a state." The US Embassy estimates that more than 50 people, including the leader of the group, died in the fighting, and that at least 300 were arrested. The Embassy reports that the group clashed with the military for several days, using weapons taken from gendarmerie stations it had overrun, and that fighting spread to other urban centers before calm was restored. []

The crackdown on the kung fu groups was widely perceived by many capital residents as unduly harsh, according to the Embassy. Armored units brought in from outside the city destroyed the homes of kung fu leaders and shot followers fleeing the scene without attempting to arrest or interrogate them. Security forces conducted unrestricted house-to-house searches in other kung fu districts of Antananarivo for several days after the fighting. Furthermore, Ratsiraka, who was out of the capital, used the affair to order unusual security precautions. []

[] the pro-Soviet opposition party, which, like the kung fu groups, draws support largely from the middle-class ethnic Merina in the capital. The president is a member of a coastal ethnic group, the Betsimisaraka. A historic rivalry exists between the largely Protestant Merina found in the central highland and the country's predominately Catholic coastal peoples. []

Origins of the Kung Fu Groups

Martial arts organizations were formed more than 10 years ago after imported kung fu films popularized the discipline among young, unemployed Malagasy. The US Embassy reports that kung fu clubs became extremely popular in Antananarivo and the central provincial capital of Fianarantsoa, where the population is predominately of the socially prominent Merina or neighboring Betsileo ethnic groups. Embassy and US defense attache sources estimate the groups had some 5,000 to 9,000 members before the crackdown, including about 3,000 practitioners in the capital. []

Although local kung fu clubs have operated independently, the US Embassy reports that members have a common disdain for government authority and a vision of themselves as defenders of the oppressed. During the past year or so, the movement gained popular sympathy because its members opposed the unpopular government-sponsored youth organization, the Tanora Tonga Saina, which was involved in organized crime, according to Embassy officials. After repeated clashes between kung fu adherents and the government youth group, the regime, which had

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tolerated the martial arts organizations, banned them in September 1984. The clubs continued to meet clandestinely, however, and tension between the youth groups culminated in an attack last December by kung fu adherents against the government youth headquarters in central Antananarivo, resulting in more than 50 dead. The Embassy reports that kung fu leaders were emboldened by their success and spoke openly of combating other unpopular government institutions such as the internal security service. []

Power Brokers or Political Pawns?

Available information, while fragmentary, lends credence to Ratsiraka's belief that the kung fu groups posed a serious political threat to the regime.

Reporting from the US Embassy [] indicates that kung fu leaders were successfully capitalizing on the movement's carefully cultivated underdog image to appeal to students, transport workers, the urban poor and middle class, and other disgruntled groups. In the past, such disaffection has led to large-scale unrest and prompted changes of government. []

In our view, Ratsiraka probably realized that, unless he moved forcefully to suppress the martial arts movement, opponents might gain significant support for their efforts to undermine the regime. Some proleft political party leaders, unhappy over the regime's openings to the West in search of greater economic aid and investment, had been courting kung fu leaders, according to US Embassy []

[] The President's suspicions of antiregime conspiracies almost certainly were heightened by the fact that many supporters of the pro-Soviet opposition party and several members of his recently dismissed Presidential Security Regiment were kung fu adherents. []

Outlook

During the kung fu crackdown, the cooperation between the Merina- and Betsileo-led army and gendarmerie—longstanding rivals for influence and resources—demonstrated a high degree of solidarity for the regime. Ratsiraka's public credibility and institutional support could wane, however, if he uses the kung fu incident as a pretext to suppress legal opposition and carry out further purges in the security services. []

In our view the crackdown and the death of the kung fu leader have weakened but not eliminated the organization. Indeed, the heavyhanded action may have increased popular sympathies for the movement, particularly among urban dwellers caught up in the clashes. The remaining kung fu leadership could capitalize on such sentiment to rebuild and to recruit members from beyond their traditional Merina and Betsileo constituency to develop sources of support in other major urban centers. More violence is likely, particularly if the regime cannot resolve the problems of urban unemployment, inflation, and periodic food and commodity shortages. []

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Ivory Coast: Ruling Party Meeting Postponed

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President Houphouet-Boigny's delay in naming a vice-presidential candidate and confusion over local committee election procedures have forced the postponement until September of the Democratic Party of the Ivory Coast (PDCI) congress that was originally slated for late August, according to the US Embassy. The Embassy also reports growing speculation that, despite popular pressure, the President will delay naming his running mate and probable successor beyond the presidential election scheduled for October. In our view, failure to select a successor would further erode the chances for a smooth transition by promoting infighting between potential contenders once the 82-year-old President passes from the scene. []



President Houphouet-Boigny

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Despite political jockeying, Houphouet continues to keep his own council on the succession. Intraparty rivalry surfaced in July during the PDCI's student congress elections for leadership. []

Mounting frustration over the inept implementation of the new voting procedures has provoked several minor incidents of violence. Local elections in 1980 sparked similar incidents that required Houphouet to step in to resolve disputes. In our view, disorganization in the party elections and the President's indecision may fuel ethnic tensions in the coming months, contributing to further divisions in the party that will increase the likelihood of instability during the transition to the second generation of leadership for the country. []

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[] The Embassy suggests that serious infighting could persuade the President to scrap the plan for an elected vice president who could become his successor. One of Houphouet's closest advisers, Minister of State Camille Alliali, speculates that the President will probably be followed "by a team," according to US Embassy reporting. A senior US Embassy official reports that another scenario includes the President appointing a prime minister who, unlike an elected vice president, would be subject to Houphouet's dismissal. []

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Disorganization among party officials also is delaying the ruling party's pregress. []

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[] the problems with local elections reflect the inability of officials to identify voters properly, which has caused the arbitrary denial of voting privileges for some and outright voter fraud by others. Elections in several localities, especially in the Abidjan area, will have to be reheld. []

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Secret**Africa
Briefs**

Angola**New Navy Chief**

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Luanda has named Lt. Col. Antonio Jose de Carvalho "Toka" commander of the Navy, filling the post left vacant last June by the sudden death of Deputy Defense Minister Augusto Alfredo in a car accident. Toka, formerly chief of logistics for the armed forces, recently completed a four-year military science course in Moscow. While the Navy is the least important branch of the Angolan military Toka's appointment underscores the close ties between the Soviets and the Angolan armed forces.

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Guinea**Conte's Continuing Challenges**

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President Conte has consolidated his power base and continues to gain widespread popular support in the wake of the 4 July coup attempt, according to the US Embassy. Nonetheless, he still faces serious ethnic and economic challenges. The President—who belongs to the small Sousou tribal group—has yet to try the plotters, who come from the influential Malinke ethnic group. He must deal firmly with them without alienating their fellow tribesmen.

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President Conte also is aware that he needs to liberalize the economy further and attract greater Western investment. Conakry currently is negotiating with the IMF on a standby arrangement that will require unpopular reforms, including devaluation, elimination of subsidies and state enterprises, and large reductions in the government payroll. The US Embassy reports, however, that there are high expectations among many civilians and junior military officers for immediate improvements in living conditions. If Western development aid falls short of what Conte expects—as it is likely to—he may decide not to risk his support by proceeding with the reforms. Conte also cannot afford to allow his need for Western economic assistance to undermine his close Soviet military ties. Moscow is still a primary source of military aid for Conakry, which allows limited Soviet access to air and port facilities.

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Botswana

Political Infighting [redacted]

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[redacted]

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[redacted] Nwako, a founding member of the BDP, was upset over his failure to be elected secretary general of the BDP at last month's party conference. Rank-and-file party members reportedly have split into two factions, one supporting Vice President Mmusi and another backing the Nwako-Kalanga coalition. Nwako has publicly been critical of Mmusi and has long harbored an ambition to be vice president himself, according to US Embassy reporting. The political infighting threatens to fragment the BDP, encourage the opposition, and enhance tribal differences. [redacted]

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